

Tetanus

Last Revised: 10/2001

Tetanus

Tetanus is a bacterium that lives in the soil and can enter the body through a cut or wound. The bacteria produce a poisonous substance - exotoxin - that causes the clinical illness.

Who gets this disease?

Tetanus occurs almost exclusively in unimmunized or inadequately immunized persons.

How is it spread?

Unlike other vaccine-preventable diseases, tetanus is not spread from person-to-person. It occurs when the bacterium in soil or dust is introduced into the body through a wound.

What are the symptoms?

The poisonous exotoxin produced by the *Clostridium tetani* bacteria causes muscles to go into spasms. Paralysis and death can result. Sometimes tetanus is called "lock jaw."

How can Tetanus be prevented?

The national Immunization Practice Advisory Committee (ACIP) recommends immunizing children against tetanus - along with diphtheria and pertussis - beginning as early as six-weeks-of-age. Children should receive five doses of diphtheria-tetanus-acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine. The first three doses are given at or near two-, four- and six-months-of-age. The fourth dose should be given between 15- to 18-months-of-age and the fifth dose at age 4- to 6-years. Booster doses of tetanus-diphtheria toxoid vaccine every 10 years after finishing the childhood primary immunization series are necessary to maintain protection against tetanus.

Also, it is important to be sure that all cuts, scrapes and puncture wounds are cleaned well with soap and water. Consult your healthcare provider for need of tetanus vaccine after a wound.

Who should be excluded?

None. Tetanus is not spread from person-to-person.

Reportable?

Yes, tetanus is reportable by New Hampshire law.